

ORIENTATION PROGRAMME FOR EXCHANGE STUDENTS: FINNISH STUDENT'S EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

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Title of publication Orientation programme for exchange students: Finnish student's expectations and experiences		
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of the thesis is to study Finnish students' expectations and experiences of the orientation week when going on exchange into a partner university of applied sciences. E.g., the duration and content of the orientation as well as how and what happened during it. The aim of the thesis is to provide ideas how to further improve the experience of the orientation week e.g., at LAB University of Applied Science and other partner universities of applied sciences.</p> <p>The theoretical part of the thesis studies the importance of different concepts as: customer experience, customer expectation, customer experience management (CEM) and customer relationship management (CMR), to be able to build a foundation for the study. The empirical part was carried out by a survey. These results were used to study how LAB UAS students experienced the orientation at their exchange university of applied science while being abroad, how it was organized and how to improve the overall experience.</p> <p>The thesis utilizes deductive approach and uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The thesis is supported by primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected with an online survey that was sent to students of LAB UAS who had participated in an exchange semester abroad. Due to limitations caused by COVID-19 outbreak, the secondary data was gathered mainly from internet articles, websites, e-books which contained relevant information.</p> <p>The study results show that Finnish students' expectation for the orientation are mainly fuzzy and implicit. Overall experience for the orientation was average at best. Thus, the study can be used as a base for creating an improved orientation for UASs.</p>		
Keywords Orientation, exchange semester, customer expectation, customer experience, customer satisfaction, LAB University of Applied Science		

Tiivistelmä

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Tämän päättötyön tarkoitus on tutkia Suomalaisten opiskelijoiden odotuksia ja kokemuksia orientaatiosta, kun he menevät vaihto-oppilaaksi ammattikorkeakouluun ulkomaille. Esim. orientaation pituus ja sisältö, sekä miten ja mitä sen aikana tapahtui. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on parantaa oppilaiden kokemusta orientaatiosta esimerkiksi LAB-ammattikorkeakoulussa ja muissa ammattikorkeakouluissa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön teoreettisessa osuudessa tutkitaan erilaisten käsitteiden tärkeyttä kuten: asiakaskokemus, asiakasodotukset, asiakaskokemuksen hallinta (CEM) ja asiakassuhteiden hallinta (CRM), joiden avulla on rakennettu tutkimuksen perusta. Empiirinen osuus toteutettiin kyselyllä. Kyselyn tuloksista selvisi, miten LAB-ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelijat kokivat orientaation heidän vaihtokohdemaansa ammattikorkeakoulussa, miten se oli organisoitu ja kuinka parantaa kokonaiskokemusta.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyössä hyödynnetään deduktiivista lähestymistapaa ja sekä kvantitatiivisia että kvalitatiivisia tutkimus tapoja. Opinnäytetyötä tukevat ensisijainen ja toissijainen tutkimustieto. Ensisijainen tutkimustieto kerättiin verkkokyselyllä, joka lähetettiin LAB-ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelijoille, jotka olivat osallistuneet vaihtolukukauteen ulkomaille. COVID-19 puhkeamisen aiheuttamien rajoitusten vuoksi, toissijainen tutkimustieto kerättiin pääasiassa internet-artikkeleista, verkkosivuista ja e-kirjoista, jotka sisälsivät asiaankuuluvaa tutkimustietoa.</p> <p>Päättötyön tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että Suomalaisten opiskelijoiden odotukset orientaatiosta ovat pääosin epäselviä ja epäsuoria. Kokonaiskokemus orientaatiosta oli parhaimmillaan keskitasoa. Siksi tutkimusta voidaan käyttää pohjana kehittäessä parannettua orientaatiota ammattikorkeakouluille.</p>		
Avainsanat Orientaatio, vaihto-oppilas, asiakasodotukset, asiakaskokemus, asiakastyytyväisyys, LAB-ammattikorkeakoulu		

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Studying abroad has many advantages, it might be one of the best chances to see the world and travel. You can gain new lifelong friends and these friends can also be important networking connections later in life. You get introduced to a new culture, traditions, customs which allow you to witness a different way of life. It helps you to hone your language skills and maybe even learn a new language. Going to a new country by yourself helps you to grow personally to be more independent. It might be a little overwhelming at times, but it tests your skills in adapting to different situations while being able to solve problems that might occur. These are skills that are very attractive for future employers. Studying abroad is an experience unlike any other, and especially if you travel with an open mind. It can give you a lot of different experiences and memories. (International Student 2020.)

Lot of Finnish students go abroad for a semester while studying in university of applied sciences, but the number of students going abroad has come down 17 percent since 2012 (Figure 1). This has happened due to the limitations of financial aid provided by the government and the pressure of graduating.

In the context of globalizing working life and Finland's competitiveness, the direction should be the opposite. It is noteworthy that a similar decline is not seen in, for example, Sweden or Norway, comments Örjan Andersson the principal of UAS Novia.

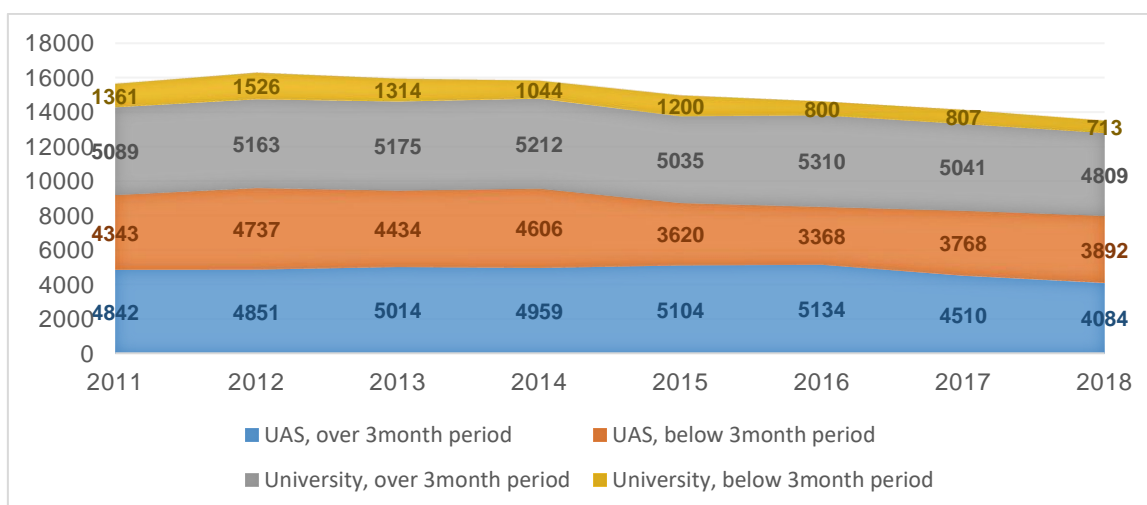


Figure 1 Participation of university students in periods abroad 2011-2018 (Arene 2019)

While the author was on exchange abroad in Mexico for a semester, the orientation week was planned and executed relatively well. This was not the case with other students, e.g., when other students came back from their exchange semester and they discussed how poorly their orientation was planned and executed. This is the first experience you have in a new UAS and it has a huge impact how your semester begins. Orientation helps students to get acquainted with the new UAS, rules, education methods and digital tools. It will also help students to get to know the other exchange students that might have same classes with them.

1.2 Thesis Objective, Research Questions and Limitations

The purpose of the thesis is to get a general understanding on what kind of orientation is offered at the exchange universities of applied sciences (UASs), where Finnish student's go to from LAB University of Applied Sciences. The purpose of this thesis is to find out what are/were Finnish students' expectations and experiences of orientation. Because orientation helps students have a better start of the semester in a new UASs and in a foreign country.

In regards to the thesis objectives, the main research question is:

- *What are Finnish students' expectations and experience in orientation week when they start their exchange semester?*

To be able to answer the thesis main question better. There are sub questions to help in answering the main question.

- *What is customer expectation and experiences?*
- *How was the orientation arranged and executed?*
- *How could the orientation week be improved?*

Every study has research limitations. First, the research focuses on students that have gone for an exchange semester abroad and only the orientation that happened in the exchange universities of applied sciences abroad. Second, the research focuses on students' expectations and experiences from these orientations that took place abroad. Third, the research focuses on Finnish students' that have studied or are studying at LAB UAS in Lahti and only such students that have participated in exchange semester. Fourth, the research perspective will not be from orientation related theoretical perspective, but from the customer expectation, experience related theoretical perspective.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis focuses on customer expectations, definition of customer expectations, types of customer expectations and customer expectations management, which is introduced in chapter two and customer experience, definition of customer experience, importance of customer experience and customer experience management which is chapter three.

1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

There are two possible research approach deductive or inductive approach. In inductive approach, there is usually little to no existing literature on the topic, it is common to perform inductive research because there is no theory to test. The inductive approach consists of three stages: First stage is when you observe, second stage is when you observe a pattern and third stage is when you develop a theory (Figure 2). (Streefkerk 2019.)

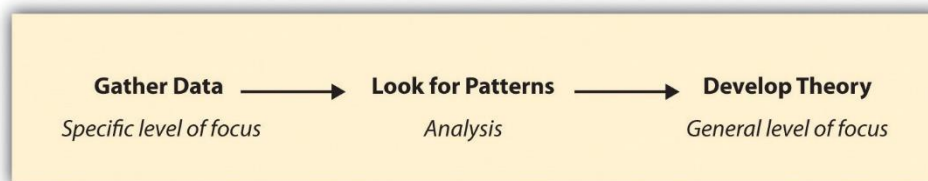


Figure 2 Inductive Research

Deductive approach always has a theory to start with. Reasoning deductively means testing these theories. If there is no theory yet, you cannot conduct deductive research. The deductive approach consists of four stages: First stage is to start with an existing theory, second stage is when you formulate a hypothesis based on existing theory, third stage is when you collect data to test hypothesis and fourth stage is when you analyze the results. (Figure 3). (Steeferk 2019.)

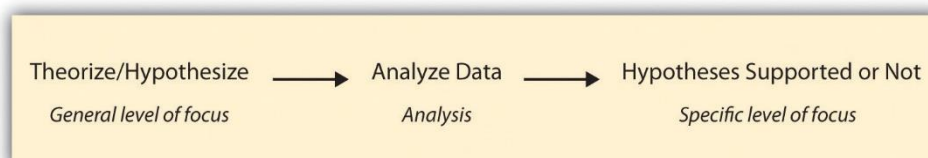


Figure 3 Deductive Research

In the thesis, author is using deductive approach since the theories for customer expectation and experience are demonstrated and confirmed.

There are two research categories: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data is mostly non-numerical data, meaning it tends to have more open-ended questions. e.g., interviews, surveys. The method aims to answer how and why people are feeling or having a subjective perception of something. Qualitative approach is good when exploring the effects and unintended consequences of a program. (Kabir 2016.)

Quantitative data is more measurable and numerical. It will most likely provide answers to questions who? when? what? and how many? The survey questions are usually close ended to be able to easily transform answer to numbers, charts, graphs, and tables. The collected data via questionnaires is usually seen more objective and reliable than qualitative data. (Jovancic 2019.)

In the thesis the author applied both qualitative and quantitative methods, since the questionnaire includes open-ended and close-ended questions to be able to compare how orientation was arranged and how it can be arranged to improve the experience.

There are two categories of data collection: Primary and Secondary data. Primary data is collected and originated from the researcher for the first time for the study using various methods surveys, interviews, questionnaires. The advantage is that the data contains specified information to help with their study. Secondary data implies to second-hand information that has been collected and published previously by someone, e.g., book, reports, and journal articles. It is easily available, but it is usually gathered for a different purpose so it might not be that relevant or accurate for the research. (Surbhi 2017.)

Primary data for the research was gathered through an online survey aimed for LAB UAS students that had participated on exchange period abroad. The questionnaire included fourteen questions and it was done using Webropol. The survey link was distributed with the help of Student Exchange Services, LAB University of Applied Sciences. Survey was open from 1st of April 2020 to 28th of April 2020. The secondary sources were gathered from digital sources from the Internet that included E-books, online articles and websites. Secondary data sources were limited to electronic sources only due to the circumstances that COVID-19 outbreak caused.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis has seven chapters.

Chapter 1: This includes the introduction. This explains the research background, the thesis objectives, research questions and limitations of the research. The research methodology and data collection.

Chapter 2 and 3: These chapters focus on the theoretical framework for the thesis. Main concepts are customer expectations and managing them, customer satisfaction and the importance of it, customer service experience and management.

Chapter 4: This chapter includes the empirical research analysis. How data collection was done and examination of it.

Chapter 5: Author gives recommendations how to execute orientation in future and recommendations for UAS customer experience management

Chapter 6: The conclusion chapter recaps the thesis main and sub-questions and brings in brief summaries for each. In addition, the validity and reliability for the study are presented. Finally, the chapter closes with suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6: The final chapter summaries the whole thesis.

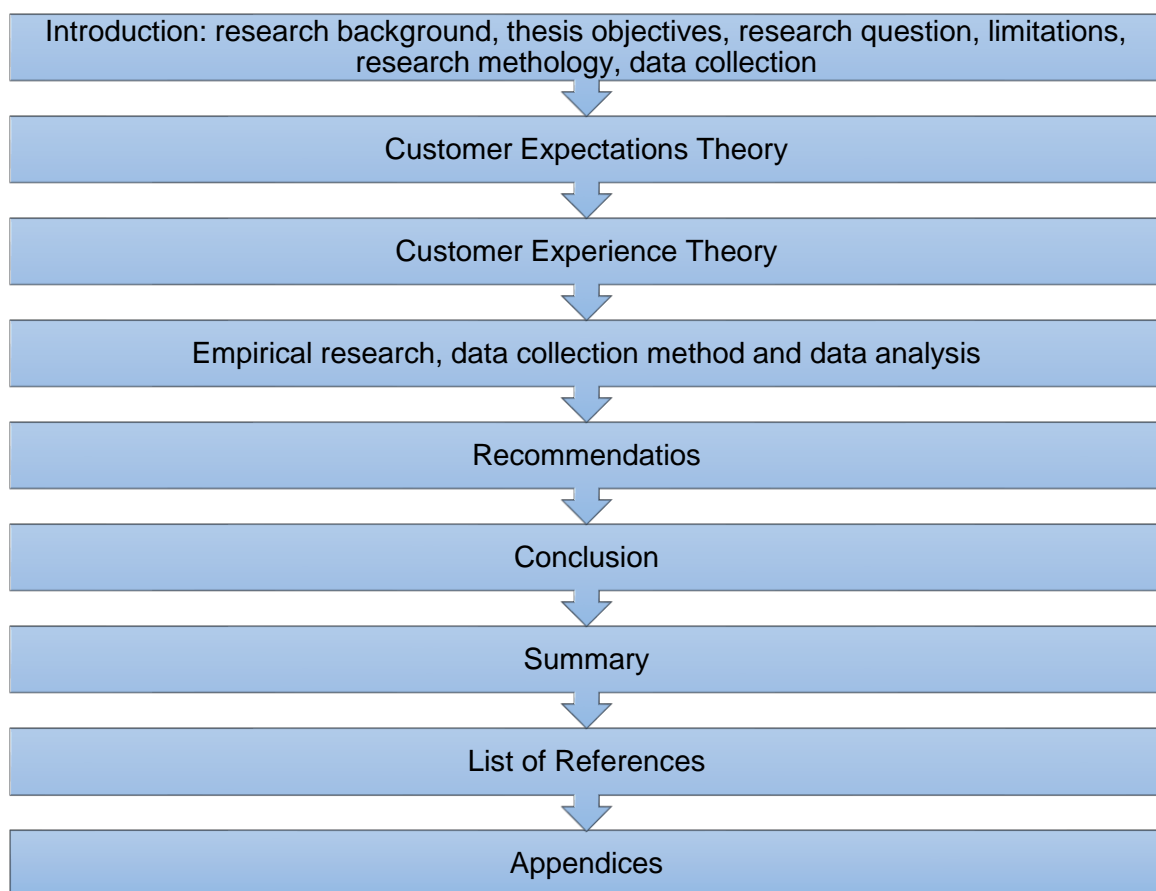


Figure 4 Thesis structure

2 CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

2.1 Customer Expectations is Important

Customer service is about expectations, and businesses need to meet or exceed these expectations. This is especially true when talking about the service in a restaurant. For example, when customer orders food, they typically expect that they will receive it in about 15 minutes. If it takes less time, the customer is pleasantly surprised and if it takes more time, the customer is displeased by the service. The only time customer experience is talked about, is when business service exceeds expectations or does not meet customers' expectations. (Bulygo 2020.)

Education is a service business where customer satisfaction is very important. Especially when considering a semester abroad, the orientation is the first chance to make a good impression to your customers, meaning the new students. After the exchange semester abroad, every student must fill out an exchange report at Mobility Online. Questionnaire include basic information about application to the UASs, about arriving to the country, orientation, studies, accommodation. Mobility Online is the first location where students go to learn about the exchange country they are planning on going to as well as the new UASs they will be attending. These exchange reports are the first information that the students use when making their decision to apply to the exchange UAS. (Mobility Online 2020.)

2.2 Definition of Customer Expectations

"Customer expectations are the feelings, needs, and ideas that customers have towards certain products or services." (Belyh 2017.)

The expectation for predicted service "that the customer anticipates and will be achieved by a service encounter before this encounter is even experienced." Previous experiences cause this to happen and if the previous service encounters have been unsatisfactory, the expectation for the next encounter is likely to be low. (Chand 2020.)

In this situation, student's personal thoughts about the orientation that will take place abroad in a new UASs are considered as customer expectations, and they have already created an expectation through the orientation that took place at LAB UAS, before their exchange abroad.

2.3 Types of Customer Expectations

To understand customer expectations better, the following types of expectations will be discussed in the thesis. The thesis focuses on three main types: fuzzy, implicit and explicit expectations (Ojasalo 2001).

Fuzzy expectation is when customers usually have only a little previous experience about a service and,

do not have a clear understanding what they want from the service provider. They feel that something is wrong, but not certain what it is or how the experience could be improved. For example, the structure of the customer's business may be causing problems at the human resource level. However, the customer is not convinced that improving the business structure would do anything else than be the change that results in long-term satisfaction. Thus, the need to improve the structure of business generates a fuzzy expectation and if it is not identified, focused, and brought to attention of the parties a wrong problem will be solved. (Ojasalo 2001, 202.)

Implicit expectation is when some characteristics or elements in service situations are so self-evident that customers do not actively or consciously think about them. (Ojasalo 2001, 203).

Good example is when you go to a restaurant. You expect that you are greeted warmly by the waiter and he or she is courteous. Atmosphere is nice and so on. These are implicit customer expectations, which are very important and easily overlooked or ignored. (Vora, 2015.)

Explicit expectation is when customer has a conscious assumption or wishes considering the service they are about to receive. In this situation,

the customer pays explicit attention to whether these expectations are met and knows clearly what went wrong if they are not met. For example, when a customer's has had a bad year and is in the verge of bankruptcy. In a situation in which nothing further can be done, the customer may expect the recruitment service to find a person that can rescue the company from bankruptcy. (Ojasalo 2001, 203.)

2.4 Managing Customer Expectations

Customer expectations vary and “having an understanding how customer expectations are formed and how they change over time provides a great foundation for effective customer expectation management”, which is vital for success. (Willott 2019.)

The thesis focuses on how to manage with fuzzy, implicit and explicit expectations. UASs are a service business, but the normal customer service solutions do not apply in the same way as, for example, in restaurants.

2.4.1 Fuzzy Expectation

The key is to provide more information for the customer to help the expectations be more precise. It is a process of defining unclear problems and needs. This helps the service provider to satisfy the customer in the long run and help them to get what they need. Sometimes there can be some fuzzy expectation revealed which the provider cannot meet, in which case the service provider has the option, or obligation, of refusing the assignment. In this case by refusing the assignment, it also serves as a long-term interest, since bad word-of-mouth would result from not solving the real problem. (Ojasalo 2001.)

2.4.2 Implicit Expectation

As mentioned earlier, implicit expectations include such situations that are so self-evident that customers do not actively or consciously think about them. Meaning communication can solve a lot of problems that might come from implicit expectations, because especially during a long customer service some of the expectations may change from being explicit to implicit. Consequently, this might cause the amount of implicit expectations to go too high and cause the service experience to become worse. Communication will increase the probability of a higher customer satisfaction by revealing the implicit expectations, but it has the downside of always requiring more of the customers time. (Ojasalo 2001.)

2.4.3 Explicit Expectation

Explicit expectations can be either unrealistic or realistic expectations. Customers sometimes have expectations of a service which cannot be met by anyone. These are called unrealistic expectations and when customer has them, disappointment is guaranteed. Communicating is required with the customer considering their unrealistic expectations to be able to get to realistic expectations and provide a satisfying service. The customers

may still be disappointed and dissatisfied when they realize their expectations were unrealistic. (Ojasalo 2001.)

2.5 Why Customer Satisfaction is Important?

As mentioned earlier, UASs are in the service business and the students are the clients. The customer satisfaction has a very high role in UASs, this factor helps UASs to stand out and attract more students to apply to their institute. Especially when nowadays social media has an important role when people are making decisions to apply for UASs. If the student is satisfied, they are more likely to post or share the feelings that they have towards the UAS across social media and that will help UAS to attract more students. (Kierzak 2020.)

3 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

3.1 Definition of Customer Experience

Customer experience includes all the interactions between company and customer, from talking to a customer service agent or receiving an email from the company. It is the sum of all interactions, measuring the overall feeling of the journey that customer has with the company or brand. Including emotional, physical and psychological connection. (Powton 2017.)

Customer experience is also defined as a proactive way for business to act in optimizing the customer journey to prevent dissatisfaction. Compared to customer service which is reactive way and usually focuses on single interactions at a time, but consistent service will impact on the customer's perception about the company or brand and eventually increases customer experience and loyalty. (Ameyo 2020.)

3.2 Importance of Customer Experience

Providing a satisfying customer experience helps in attract and retain customers in the current ultra-competitive business environment, because consumers have shown that they will not hesitate to change company if they had a bad experience. It also lowers operational cost while increasing revenue. (Smith 2018.)

When customer has a good or bad service experience, they are going to spread word about it. It can be helpful or damaging to the company and it happens fast through world wide web or social media, which has also increased the receivers. By ensuring a positive customer experience companies gain more loyal customers, who will promote the service or product and help them gain new customers. (Bordeaux 2020.)

3.3 Customer Experience Management

Customer experience management (CXM or CEM) is a fundamental component for companies to be able to contribute a good customer experience especially when thinking about service business. It helps companies by monitoring and enhancing different touch-points along the customer journey, which will bring more value and help build stronger and long-term relationships with customers. (Bordeaux 2020.)

According to Ameyo (2020), in today's current hyper competitive market CEM,

is emerging as the key strategy to gain a competitive advantage, because the main objective is to optimize customer interactions to align with customer's ideal brand perception and exceed their expectations to nurture and strengthen long term customer relationships. It is designed to manage and organize every customer interaction with a brand across the consumers journey.

Shaw, who is a leading expert on the customer experience, found that after several years of research looking at the emotions elicited from consumers, there are four clusters of emotions which can drive or destroy value, shown in Figure 4. This model illustrates how critical these emotions are when delivering the product or a service and it makes the difference between serving and engaging customers. (Morgan 2020.)



Figure 5 Four Clusters of Emotions which Drive or Destroy Value (Morgan 2020)

The top group, "Advocacy, is rooted in the feeling of happiness". Shaw argues that "we seek out experiences which make us feel happy", because that is the ultimate goal for humans and happy customers will become advocates for the company. The Recommendation group includes "basic emotions like trust, being cared for, feeling valued". The personalization "element of these emotions is powerful as a desire to recommend". The bottom two groups are the ones you need to be concerned. The Attention group contains emotions that organizations use to attract attention i.e. interest, indulge, stimulate, energetic. But this needs to be monitored, because attraction alone does not last forever. The bottom group is the one that companies need to be concerned about, because it holds the emotions that are "negative and tend to come from organizations which are focused on the "inside" rather "outside" view". In this group customer's interactions with the companies usually cause them to feel "frustrated, angered, irritated, neglected or dissatisfied". To be able to create a good customer experience strategy, companies also need to

consider the emotional side of the customers, which will improve the customer experience. (Morgan 2020.)

3.4 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

There is another crucial element beside CEM to be able to keep customers happy, which is customer relationship management (CRM). It has different objective compared to CEM, CRM is usually a technology platform or software solution. Its main function is to track customer interactions to be able to drive sales and to resolve problems. CRM also includes the best practices and strategies to retain existing customers and improve relationship with them. CRM platforms collect and analyze data from the customers behavior: how they became customer? How often they buy? How much they spend? In what way do customer interact with the company's online presence? Thus, covering the whole journey and lifecycle of the customer. CRM is more transactional by tracking customer behavior, while CEM is more concerned about whether the customer had a good experience while shopping on the store or website. E.g., was the service good? CEM is created from customers view and CMR is created from the companies view. This means it is important for companies to find the correct combination of CEM and CMR to be able to gain more customers, keep them happy and loyal. (Pendolino 2017.)

4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Online Survey

The research data, for the thesis, was collected via Webropol survey. The author used Webropol survey since it has multiple options how to analyze data. The survey was sent to students that had participated in an exchange semester abroad. The survey did not include any general information about participants (age, gender etc.), as such information was not the focus of the survey considering the thesis subject.

The survey created with Webropol was opened officially 1st of April and closed on 28th of April, meaning that the survey was open for almost a month. Eighty-one students completed the questionnaire. The online survey had fourteen questions in English targeted with the survey were students that had gone for an exchange semester abroad, thus were able to complete the survey in English. The survey link was distributed with the help of Student Exchange Services at LAB UAS. The author started compiling the information 15th of April from open ended questions which included different games and whether there was something that should have been added to the orientation, even though the survey was open. After 29th of April the author started analyzing the data from the survey.

4.2 Analyzing the Data

This section of the thesis examines the survey questions and provides answers given by LAB UAS students' that participated on an exchange semester abroad. The survey questions consisted of four parts. First part included the study country, duration of orientation and whether it was long enough. Second part included how did the orientation information help students to get familiar with the UASs and regarding to previous question, whether the information was enough. Also, were they informed about the city they were living at and regarding to previous question, whether the information was enough. Third part asked whether the orientation helped to get to know other students' and it was also about bonding activities, whether there were any of them and should they be part of orientation. There was also an open question to describe good bonding activity games. The last part focused on overall experience of the orientation and whether there was something that should have been added to the orientation.

Part 1

The first question in this part focused on which country the exchange happened for the student. The question had twenty-four countries and 'other country' as an option to select

from. There were few countries that none of the students had gone for exchange, therefore the following six countries were excluded from the research answers: Brazil, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Russia and Taiwan. From eighty-one student that answered, majority 18.52% attended other country followed by Spain with 13.58%, then Belgium and Germany 8.64%, Austria and Ireland 6.17%, Mexico and Netherlands 4.94%, United Kingdom 3.7%, then 2.47% attended at Denmark, France, Hungary, Iceland, Japan and Sweden, final 1.24% were in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Slovenia (Table 1).

Table 1 Exchange countries where students´ attended

	n	Percentage		n	Percentage
Austria	5	6,17%	Italy	1	1,23%
Belgium	7	8,64%	Japan	2	2,47%
Cyprus	1	1,24%	Mexico	4	4,94%
Denmark	2	2,47%	Netherlands	4	4,94%
France	2	2,47%	Slovenia	1	1,23%
Germany	7	8,64%	South Korea	4	4,94%
Greece	1	1,24%	Spain	11	13,58%
Hungary	2	2,47%	Sweden	2	2,47%
Iceland	2	2,47%	United Kingdom	3	3,7%
Ireland	5	6,17%	Other	15	18,52%

The second question considering to the length of the orientation, the author decided to create five duration clusters. The durations were set as 1-2 days, 3-4 days, 5-6 days, week and more than a week as the UASs have different length for orientations. Surprisingly there were answers on all the duration clusters. Most of the students participated on 1-2 days of orientation, with 43% followed with 3-4 days of orientation with 26%, 5-6 days with 7% week with 20%, and finally more than a week with 4% (Figure 5).

Question 2 How long did the orientation last for?

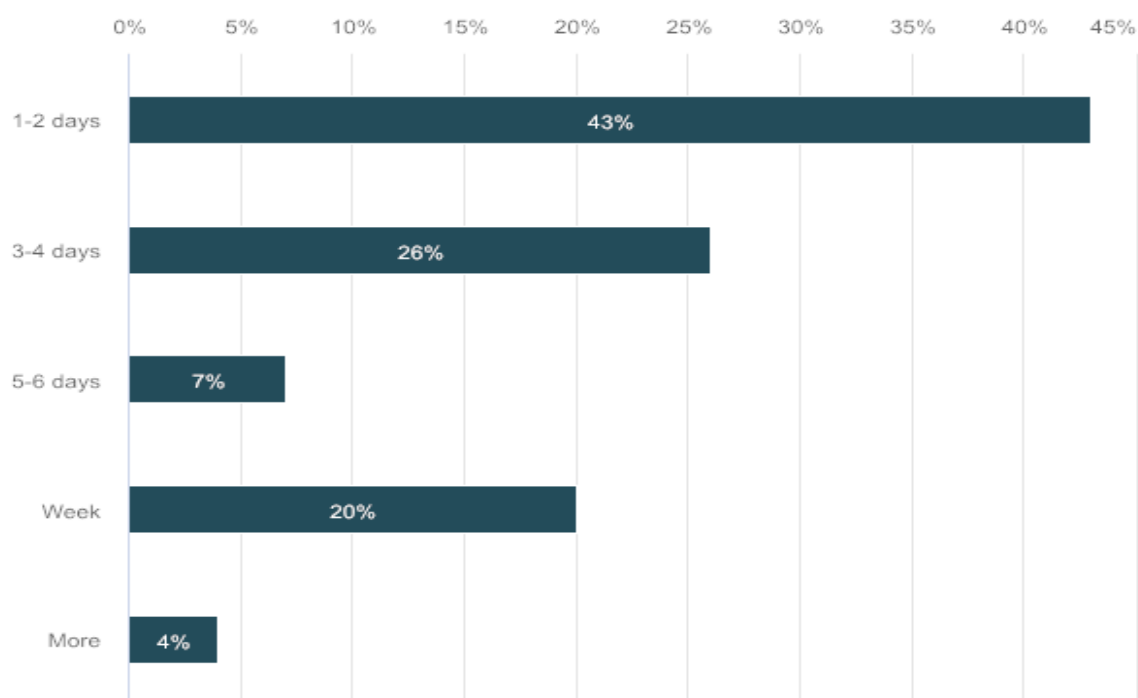


Figure 6 Duration of orientation

The third question was related to previous question “how long did the orientation last for?”, whether the duration of the orientation was long enough. The question was divided into three answer possibilities: too long, enough and too short. Most of the students felt that the duration of orientation was enough with a share of 79%, then it was too short with a share of 19% and after that it was too long for 2% (Figure 6).

Question 3 Was the duration of orientation long enough?

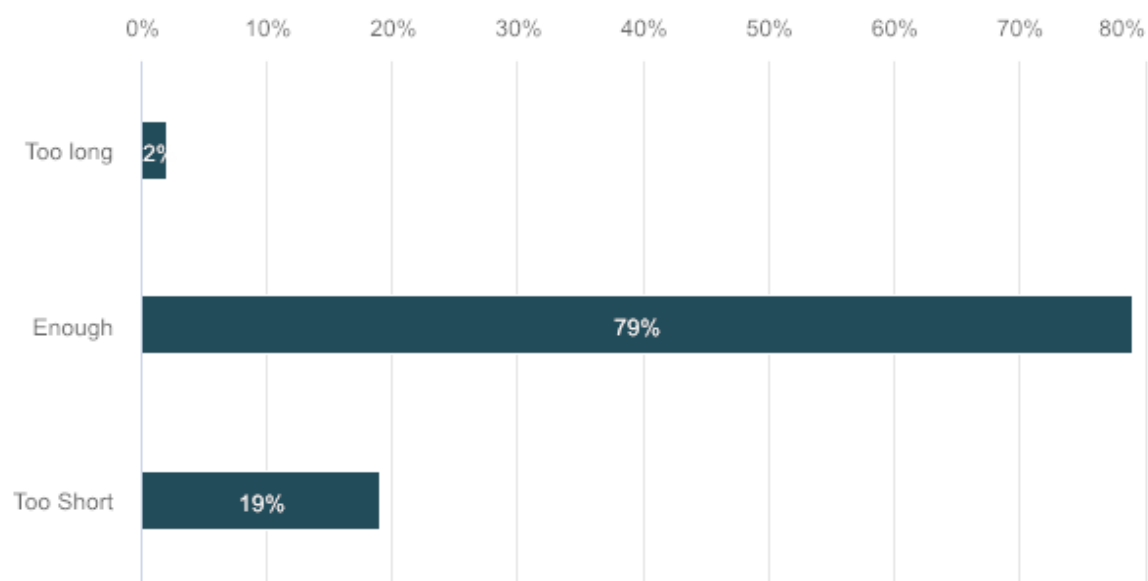


Figure 7 Duration of orientation

To analyze, whether the duration was long enough it needs to be cross examined with the duration of orientation. Orientation that lasted between 1-2 days was enough for 63% and was too short for 37%. Orientation that lasted between 3-4 days was enough for 90% and too short for 10%. Orientation that lasted between 5-6 days was enough for 100%. Orientation that lasted for a week was enough for 88% and too long for 12%. Orientation that lasted more than a week was enough for 100%.

In multiple countries, the duration of orientation varies between the UASs and this causes some problems when analyzing whether the duration was long enough. To be able to analyze this part properly, the survey should have had a question with more specific information considering what country UAS did the students attend. When cross referencing this data, the author realized that this would be a subject for further research.

Part 2

The first question in this part was “did the orientation information help students to get familiar with the UAS at the exchange location?”. The question had only yes or no options to choose from. Eighty-six percent answered yes, and fourteen percent said no. There is something fundamentally wrong in the orientation that took place in some UASs, considering if 14% did not get familiar with UASs at the exchange location.

The second question was related to the previous question, whether the information about the UAS was enough. The question had three options to choose from: lot, enough, too little. Most of the students gained enough information with a share of 65%, followed with too little information with a share of 21%, the rest gained lot of information with the share of 14% (Figure 7). Based on the answers in question thirteen and fourteen, “was there something that should have been added or improved in the orientation of your exchange UAS?”, most of students did not receive enough information about timetable of the courses or how the UAS intranet is used.

How much information did you receive on how UAS works?

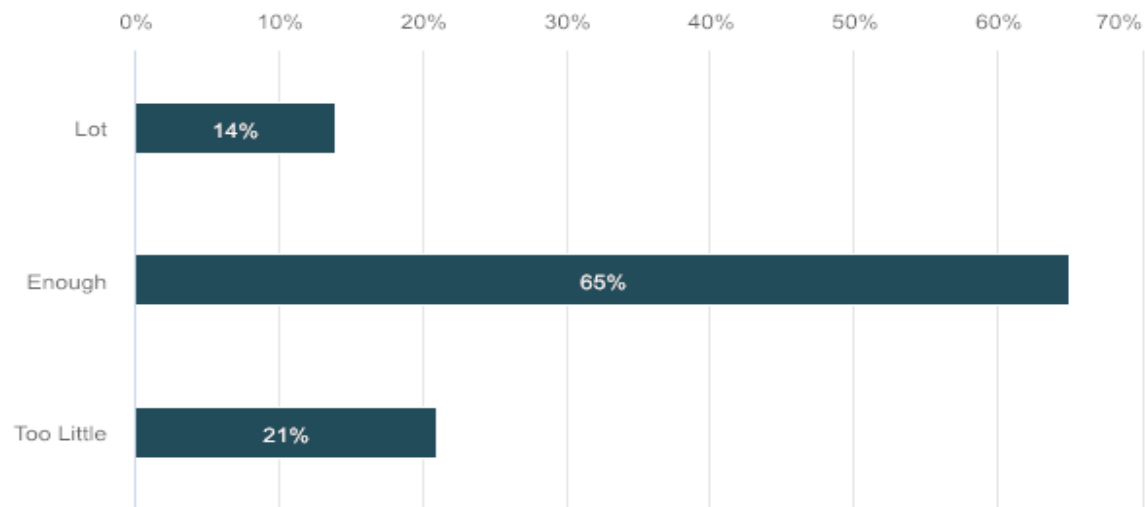


Figure 8 Amount of information received about UAS

The third question was “were you informed about the city where you lived at? (Stores, locations, culture)”. The question had only yes and no option, because of a follow up question. Most of the students answered yes with a share of 75% and the rest of the students answered no with a share of 25%. The answers should be only yes in this question, considering the students are going to be there for a semester and information about the city they are living at is crucial to make the transition between UASs easier.

The fourth question was a follow up question related to previous one, whether the information considering the city was: good, enough or too little. Answers to this question divided fairly even, but most of the answers were good with a share of 40% followed up with enough 33% and then too little with a share of 27% (Figure 8).

Regarding previous question, if you answered yes - was the information enough.

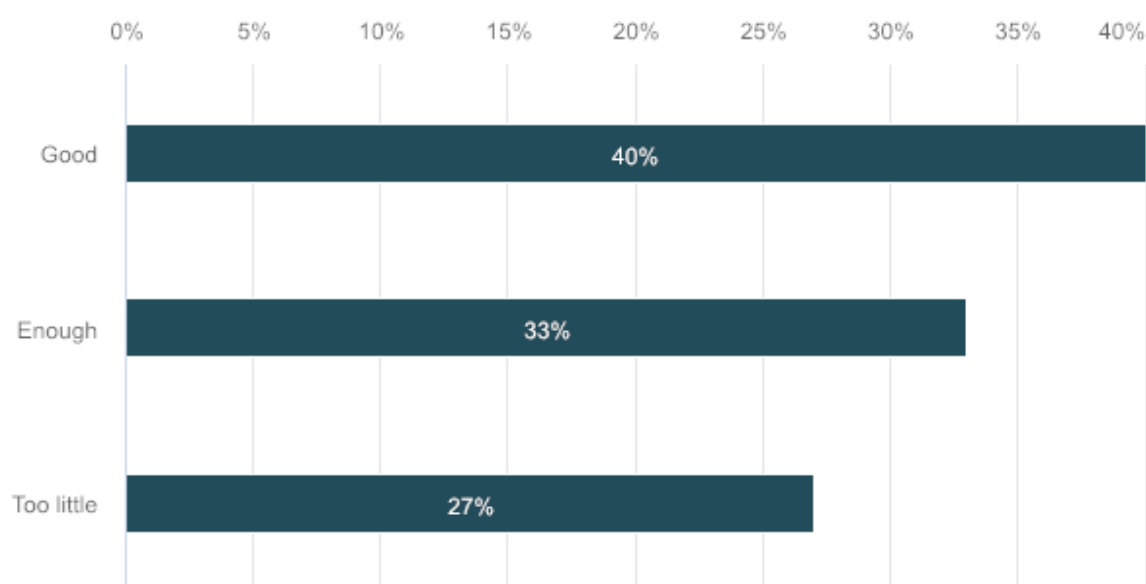


Figure 9 Information received about the city

Part 3

The first question was “did the orientation help you get to know other students?”. The question was divided to yes or no answers. Most of the answers were yes with a share of 76% and the rest were no with a share of 24%, but the author wondered how there were so many “no” answers. Considering the situation where the students are, therefore all the answers should be yes. This creates a concern on how the orientation is executed if students have trouble connecting with fellow students.

The second question was “did the orientation have any bonding activities (games) to lighten the mood and to get to know each other?”. This question had two options, yes with a share of 53% and no with a share of 47%. Most Finnish students are used to having these awkward games that help them to get to know the other students and the author also had these games while attending an exchange semester in Mexico.

The third question was also related to bonding activities, should they be a part of orientation. The question had two options to choose from, yes or no. The author was pleasantly surprised that most of the answers were yes with a share of 74% and the rest were no with a share of 26%. These awkward games are a good icebreaker that help students to loosen up and get more relaxed.

The fourth question was not a mandatory question to answer. It was an open question to collect great and easily executed bonding activities. There were twenty-four answers on the question, sadly the descriptions were shorter and most of the games that students

described were mainly drinking games and they are not suitable to recreate inside e.g., LAB UAS campus. These different orientation bonding activities are collected in chapter 5.2.4.

Part 4

The first question was “how was the overall experience of the orientation?”. The question had five categories to choose from: very good, good, average, poor and very poor. All categories had answers. Very good had a share of 20%, good had a share of 38%, average had a share of 30% and very poor had a share of 2%. Over 58% of the students had a good overall experience at orientation (Figure 9).

How was the overall experience of the orientation?

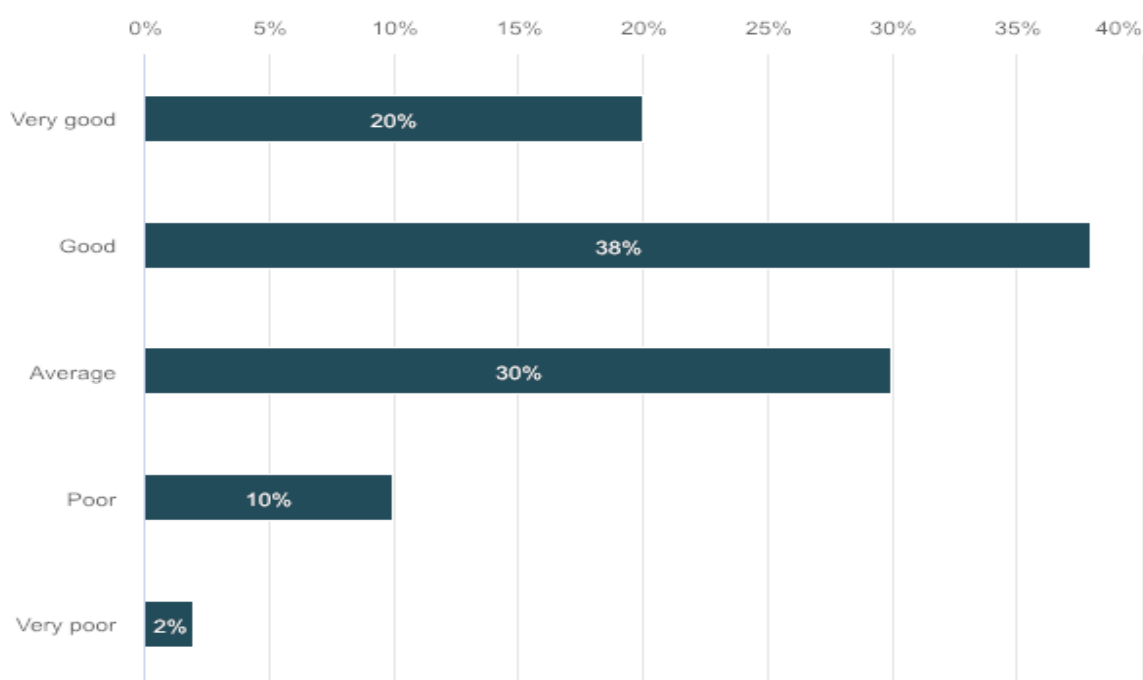


Figure 10 Overall experience of the orientation

The second question “was there something that should have been added to your orientation at your exchange UAS?”. The question was created as a fill in text question. There were twenty-five answers to the question. Many students felt that the platforms and the intranet used in different UASs should have had more time to go through properly. Lot of students were complaining that they did not even receive a campus tour. Some students would have loved to get a city tour to be able to find grocery, clothing store and know how to move around the city. As mentioned in a previous question, some UASs did not have bonding activities and there were several comments that there were no events with other

students at all. For some reason, some of the students had the orientation with the local new students attending to the UASs, therefore they did not get to know anyone who was attending the same classes as them. One student gained some information that might not be that relative.

“Too much information that wasn't necessary, such as sex education and dating tips... Also, it would have been nice to have the orientation for just exchange students, not to everyone starting as new students”

The third question was an open question “is/was there something that should be added or improved in the orientation?”. When creating the questions, the author did not realize this question is similar to the previous question. This caused a lot of similarities in the answers, therefore the findings in the question are limited. There were thirteen answers to the question. Some students were hoping to have some interaction with the local students also, because they did not have any contact with the local students and this would have helped them to get to know the city and what there is to do easier. Few of the students wanted to meet with all the exchange students. One answer was:

It would be nice for internship students, have all same orientation, because therefore they have chance to meet other exchange students' different fields. Because during internship is hard to meet other students. Even though there is a lot of activities that student is organizing.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides information considering Finnish students experiences and expectations of the orientation as previously mentioned in Chapter 1. In this chapter, author gives recommendations how to improve the experience of orientation based on the previously mentioned theory, the extracted and analyzed information that was gained from the survey in Chapter 4, also the experiences and knowledge of the author.

5.1 Finnish Students` Expectations

Based on the analyzed data from the survey and theory that the author researched in chapter 2, most of Finnish students` expectations are fuzzy and implicit expectations.

5.1.1 Fuzzy Expectations

The first reason why Finnish students` expectation are fuzzy is because most of the students have participated in orientation only once, which was conducted at LAB UAS. Meaning the students have only little previous experience about the service and do not have a clear understanding what they want from the service provider, which in this case are the exchange UASs abroad. Even though the orientation in LAB UAS from authors point of view informed all the necessary information for students to be able to succeed on their new academic journey.

The second reason that creates fuzzy expectations amongst Finnish students is the education system in Finland, which students have gotten used to and know how it goes. The education system is one of the cornerstones of the Finnish welfare society. In Finland UASs provide more practical education that aims to respond to the needs of the labor market.

How to deal with students who have fuzzy expectation?

According to Ojasalo (2001), the key is to give more valuable and up to date information that is expected from the service provider to the customer, in this case the service providers are the exchange UASs and the customers are the Finnish students. From analyzing the data gathered, the students were missing lot of crucial information e.g., how different platforms are used in UASs, tour of the campus, information on the exams, timetable for the courses to avoid overlapping. It is crucial for students to get all the information. The UASs have their own websites, which would be an easy way to put the information for the students to read.

5.1.2 Implicit Expectations

The first reason why the expectations are implicit (Ojasalo 2001), is based on the analysis of the research data that was collected. Most of the Finnish students expected to get all the necessary information at the orientation, which is usually so self-evident in a service situation that students do not actively or consciously think about it. Unfortunately, that was not the case at the exchange UASs. Multiple students answered in the survey on question thirteen and fourteen, which were almost similar, and the question was “was there something that should have been added or improved in your orientation at the exchange UASs?”. Students answered that they did not receive information considering the UASs campus and surroundings, information concerning courses and the timetable when they are conducted, UAS intranet, city they lived at, how to get to the campus from student dorm. All of these are crucial information for a new student.

The second reason for implicit expectations, is the education system in Finland. The education system is one of the cornerstones of the Finnish welfare society and schools generally provide all the required information without even asking. Therefore, after attending for several years at the Finnish education system, it will create implicit expectations amongst the students from Finland.

How to deal with students with implicit expectations?

Based on the theory of the thesis, communication can solve lot of problems which are caused by implicit expectations (Ojasalo 2001). To be able to provide more accurate information at the exchange UASs, the duration of the orientation needs to be extended and more information needs to be added into the orientation to increase the satisfaction of students. Based on the results of the survey, the length of the orientation was too short. This caused the information about UASs campus, transportation, city they lived at and the digital tools that students are required to use and know how, was not enough.

Before the students even travel to the exchange country, the communication between UASs and students should be more accurate and informative. Currently based on the gathered and analyzed data the students do not receive enough information even about the courses they have selected and timing of them. Therefore, when they arrive to the exchange UASs they are required to select different courses due to overlapping. Enhancing communication would lower the amount of questions the students have and changes they are required to do when they arrive to the exchange UASs, which would result into lower dissatisfaction from students and exchange UASs. If there is enough information before

hand, it will remove implicit expectations from the students considering to the exchange UASs. Exchange UASs could easily create an information package on their website for exchange students to be able to lower the amount of implicit expectations caused by attending for several years in Finnish education system.

5.2 Recommendations How to Execute the Orientation in The Future

5.2.1 Duration of Orientation

The length of orientation plays a crucial part in the orientation. There must be enough time to go through how the UAS works and what systems are necessary for the students' and how to use them properly. There also needs to be enough time to let the student's bond with each other to connect and make new friends, because students go to live in a new city abroad without a safety net to go to. This helps in the transitioning into the new learning environment with help of others that are in the same situation. Without the possibility to bond with other students, it might cause bigger problems for the student and may result into student leaving home before the semester is over.

5.2.2 Information During Orientation

To be able to provide the expectations and experiences that the students have, i.e., implicit expectations, there needs to be more communication in the orientation and more specific information needs to be provided. The provided information for students needs to involve the following aspects: how to use the digital systems in exchange UASs, how to maneuver inside the campus or to the campus, where to eat lunch, how are the exams arranged. Usually the learning environment in exchange UASs is different compared to UASs in Finland due to the difference in education system so information is crucial for new students. Based on the survey answers, a tour and information about the city where students are living, would be appreciated to make the settling down easier.

There were few UASs that provided some information during the orientation, which should have been given beforehand to the student e.g., how to do changes to the learning agreement, course content and timetable.

5.2.3 Recommendations for UASs Customer Experience Management

The theoretical part mentioned customer experience is the sum of all interactions between the company and customer, measuring the overall feeling of the journey that customer has with the company or brand, including emotional, physical and psychological

connection (Powton 2017). This is the reason why exchange UASs should pay more attention to the orientation of Finnish exchange students, it is the beginning of their journey in UAS and it sets the base for all the interactions and emotions that come after that with the exchange UAS.

As mentioned earlier in the theoretical part, CEM is a fundamental component for companies to be able to contribute a good customer experience especially when thinking about service business (Bordeaux 2020). To be able to match the Finnish exchange students' expectations and experiences from the orientation, the UASs need to know what these expectations and experiences are. The author recommends that the UASs should conduct surveys before the orientation starts and when it is over, the survey needs to have detailed questions concerning e.g. length, information, intranet, campus. These surveys would help UASs to make the correct adjustments to their orientation and increase the overall experience. In the current digital age, there are many exceptional tools to conduct the surveys quickly with ease.

As mentioned in the theoretical part, customer satisfaction is important (Kierzak 2020). UASs are in the service business and the students are clients. UASs need to be able to stand out to create a positive picture of the experience that students will gain, while doing the exchange semester in their UAS. To be able to create a good customer experience strategy, UASs need to consider the emotional side of the students to be able to improve the experience. This will help UASs to attract more students.

5.2.4 Orientation Bonding Activities and Games

It can be intimidating to enter unfamiliar social situations. Thus, it is important to make it easy for students to meet and connect with their advisors and classmates through ice-breaker activities and social gatherings (Engelman 2019).

There are a lot of different types of bonding games to help students to get acquainted with other classmates. They are a good way to make the start of the semester more relaxed and fun for everyone. The survey questionnaire had a question about different activities and games that students had participated in, which are easy to recreate. The author collected these different activities and games here.

Game 1. Divide people into teams of two. Make an area that is 2m wide and 5m in length that has small obstacles that will not break easily or are soft. One team member is standing on the other side of the area and is blindfolded, while another team member is on the opposite side of the area giving instructions how to get through the area without hitting the

obstacles. If you touch the obstacles, then the team is disqualified. The event is timed and fastest team wins.

Game 2. Take a big plastic tarp but take consideration that the size of the tarp, also equals the number of participants for the game. Students go stand on the tarp and try to turn the tarp around by using their feet or hands while everyone is still standing on it. Main rule of the game is that you cannot step off the tarp. This activity helps to loosen some of personal space that people have.

Game 3. Use a huge bouncing ball that teams of 10 people in a circle pass the ball in the air between each other like in volleyball. Main rule is that you try to pass to a different person all the time. Different teams compete who can get the most passes.

Game 4. You use pieces of tube, for example PVC drainpipe that is sliced in half and cut into pieces 30cm length, a bucket and a rubber ball. Different teams compete against each other who is the fastest in sliding the rubber ball into the bucket from a 10m distance. The crucial part is that team members need to hold the piece of PVC pipe to make a slide for the ball to get it to the bucket without dropping it onto the floor. Speed of the ball and participants play a crucial role in this game, because after the ball passes through someone's PVC pipe piece, then they can move and need to run into the front to be able to continue the slide for the ball. Fastest team wins.

Game 5. City game, which involves going around the city to find clues to answer quizzes. Also, a different version that involves doing tasks in certain location to get a stamp on a pass.

Game 6. Bingo. Everyone is given a bingo sheet with different statements of e.g., hobbies, personalities, skills. Students need to find the correct person to fill the boxes to get a bingo.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Answers to Research Questions

The main objective of the thesis is to analyze and research what are the student's expectations and experiences from the orientation organized by the exchange semester UASs while abroad. In addition, the aim of the thesis was to find ways to improve the experience of orientation. To achieve the goal of the research, author had one main research question and three sub-questions. The table below includes the questions and answers for them.

Table 2 Research questions and answers

Research Question	Answer
Sub question one: What is customer expectation and experiences?	<p>Customer expectations are the feelings, needs, and ideas that customers have towards certain products or services. (Belyh 2017.) The expectation for predicted service that the customer anticipates and will be achieved by a service encounter before this encounter is even experienced. Previous experiences cause this to happen and if the previous service encounters have been unsatisfactory, the expectation for the next encounter is likely to be low. (Chand 2020.)</p> <p>Customer Experience is the sum of all interactions, measuring the overall feeling of the journey that customer has with the company or brand. (Powton 2017.) It is also defined as a proactive way for businesses to act in optimizing the customer journey to prevent dissatisfaction. (Ameyo 2020.)</p>

<p>Sub question two: How was the orientation arranged and executed?</p>	<p>Orientation was arranged generally satisfying most of the students' expectations based on the survey answers. Duration was enough for 79% of the students, 76% of students got to know other students within UAS while in the orientation, 53% of UASs had bonding activities in the orientation.</p> <p>Execution of the orientation was done quickly in 1-2 days at 43% of the exchange UASs, which caused 19% of the students to answer that the orientation was too short. This fast pace probably caused the lack of information provided in the orientation considering how UASs work for 21% of the students. Also, the information about the city was too little for 27% of the students. Previous answers probably were the reason why the overall experience of the orientation to be very good only for 20% and good for 38%, average and below it, was for the rest of the students with a share of 42%.</p>
<p>Sub question three: How to improve orientation week?</p>	<p>The duration of the orientation plays a crucial part. There must be enough time to go through how UAS and campus works, go through the necessary systems and give all the required information to be able to use them properly. Also, time to be able to bond with other students to be able to gain friends in a new city, because usually everyone is in a new country and city all alone. This is crucial so students stay in the exchange country for the whole</p>

	<p>semester. Orientation is the beginning of the students' journey and it set the base for all the future interactions and emotions that follow it.</p>
<p>Main thesis research question: What is Finnish students' expectations and experience in orientation when they start their exchange semester?</p>	<p>Most of the Finnish students' expectations were based on the previous experience and this caused disappointment amongst the students. The study showed that Finnish student expectations were fuzzy and implicit. Students expected to get to know the other students at the exchange UASs, especially the students' who had the same classes as them, which unfortunately did not happen for 24% of the students. And of course students expected to be given more information on the following aspects: how the exchange UASs campus works and how to maneuver inside them, how to use exchange UASs intranet and other digital systems, also based on the survey answers lot of students were hoping for a tour in the city they are going to live for the semester.</p> <p>Overall experience of the orientation was very good for 20% followed with good for 38%, followed with average for 30%, followed with poor for 10% and very poor 2% of the students. Therefore, the expectations of Finnish students caused the overall experience of the orientation to be divided. The UASs need to improve the experience of the orientation to help students adjust better into their new learning environment.</p>

6.2 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are concepts used to evaluate the quality of research. They indicate how well a method, technique or test measure something. Reliability is about the consistency of a measure and validity is about the accuracy of a measure. (Middleton 2020.)

The thesis included both secondary and primary data. The secondary data was conducted by using reliable and trustworthy internet sources. However, due to the circumstances caused by COVID-19 outbreak, only electronic secondary data sources were used. These sources included e-books, articles, websites which were relevant to the thesis topic. The primary data was gathered by using an online survey. The survey was conveyed by Student Exchange Services at LAB LUAS. The survey did not involve incentives or rewards and participation was voluntary. The responses to the survey was provided by eighty-one anonymous students, each of these can be considered valid and reliable.

6.3 Suggestion for Further Research

The thesis purpose was to study Finnish students' expectations and experience for orientation of the exchange UASs when going abroad. From the findings, the author gives recommendation to research difference on the orientation between exchange UASs rather than exchange countries. Also, another study could examine whether the students' age has an effect? or even the students' gender?

Also, based on the findings on the thesis, the author gives recommendation to study how orientation is arranged from the exchange students' perspective that are attending LAB UAS or other Finnish UASs. This research could be used to create more unified orientation manual for Finnish UASs, that has more specific timetable and details on how to do the orientation. For example, covering such areas as what bonding activities to do, how to use the UAS intranet and other applications, what to show from the city, what is important information to tell the new students e.g. how to get to campus with public transportation, how the parking lot works could create a better overall experience for all the new students, have a better overall experience and more relaxed to start their new journey in UAS. The research would benefit LAB UAS, as well as other Finnish UASs and the tutors at the UASs.

7 SUMMARY

The thesis purpose was to study Finnish student's expectations and experience for orientation of the exchange universities of applied sciences when going abroad. The thesis results can be used to improve the orientation, e.g., at LAB UAS or other UASs.

The study is based on qualitative and quantitative research methods and applies a deductive approach. The study is based on viewpoint of Finnish students that are studying in LAB UAS and have participated in an exchange semester abroad. The research consists of theoretical and empirical part. Theoretical part goes through the concepts as, customer expectations and customer expectation management, customer experience and customer experience management, the importance of these concepts in service business as the foundation for the research.

The empirical part consists of data collecting and analyzing. The data was collected with the help of LAB UAS student exchange services, who send the Webropol questionnaire link to students that have gone for an exchange semester abroad.

The author gives recommendations to improve the orientations that takes place in UASs by extending the length of the orientation and giving more detailed information about UAS, campus, education, intranet, digital tools, and hopefully about the new city where students will be living at. The author has answered the main research questions and three sub questions, validity and reliability has been confirmed and further suggestions for research topics has been also given. The last chapter summarizes the thesis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Survey questionnaire

Orientation Week Survey

This confidential survey is part of my thesis process and focuses on how the orientation week is executed in the exchange countries.

Thank you for your time and participation in this survey!

Sincerely,
Jani Pursiainen

1. Which country did you go for student exchange? *

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Austria | <input type="radio"/> Greece | <input type="radio"/> Slovenia |
| <input type="radio"/> Belgium | <input type="radio"/> Hungary | <input type="radio"/> South Korea |
| <input type="radio"/> Brazil | <input type="radio"/> Iceland | <input type="radio"/> Spain |
| <input type="radio"/> Croatia | <input type="radio"/> Ireland | <input type="radio"/> Sweden |
| <input type="radio"/> Cyprus | <input type="radio"/> Italy | <input type="radio"/> Taiwan |
| <input type="radio"/> Denmark | <input type="radio"/> Japan | <input type="radio"/> United Kingdom |
| <input type="radio"/> Estonia | <input type="radio"/> Mexico | <input type="radio"/> Other |
| <input type="radio"/> France | <input type="radio"/> Netherlands | |
| <input type="radio"/> Germany | <input type="radio"/> Russia | |

2. How long did the orientation last for? *

- ☐ 1-2 days
- ☐ 3-4 days
- ☐ 5-6 days
- ☐ Week
- ☐ More

3. Was the duration of the orientation? *

- ☐ Too long
- ☐ Enough

☐ Too Short

4. Did the orientation help you to get familiar with the university? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. Regarding the previous question, how much information did you receive on how the university works? *

☐ Lot

☐ Enough

☐ Too Little

6. In orientation, were you informed about the city where you lived at? (Stores, locations, culture etc.) *

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. Regarding previous question, if you answered yes - was the information ...*

☐ Good

☐ Enough

☐ Too little

8. Did the orientation help you to get know other students? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

9. Did your orientation have any bonding activities (games) to lighten the mood and to get to know each other? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

10. Do you think these bonding activities (games) should be part of the orientation? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

11. If you had bonding activities (games) which were good, please describe them below:

12. How was the overall experience of the orientation? *

☐ Very good

☐ Good

☐ Average

☐ Poor

☐ Very poor

13. Was there something that should have been added to your orientation at your exchange University?

14. Is/Was there something that should be added or improved in the orientation?

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